

Feedback:Feedforward - An Open Letter from the Media Equipment Pool 1971  
excerpts

In the Beginning...

A New York City group named Videofreex proposed the Mediabus project to the New York State Council on the Arts. The idea was to travel across the state introducing people to video. The State Council, excited about the possibilities of video as a relevant art medium of high access, built onto Mediabus the idea of regional equipment pools, which would make video resources available to people on a more continuing basis. The Rochester Museum and Science Center agreed to be a sponsor for the Videofreex Mediabus project and a location for the beginning of a Rochester Media Equipment Pool, and in June 1971 a grant was born. The RMSC contributed the first floor of a house and the Media Equipment Pool began accumulating equipment (hardware) and people who could use it and teach others to use it (software).

What We've Been Doing

Most of the video activity of the first months has consisted of workshops in the use of the equipment and short-term loans to individuals and groups who have experimented with various uses of video: information-gathering, documentation, instruction, drama, video environment, artistic expression and abstract electronic feedback. Some people are into "process" the experience of recording and seeing yourself (substitute: seeing your group) at the same moment or afterward. This might sound narcissistic at first, but the effects are powerful... Other people have created "products" – ie. Finished edited tapes designed to communicate something to others.

A Democratic Medium

One of the nice things about video is the possibility of combining process and product. We're evolving an ethic of television which approaches people and information differently from the strictly product-oriented mass-media approach we've all been raised on. In this ethic, television is produced for real purposes, by the people who are involved, for an audience of whomever they want to get their message across to. Members of the Equipment Pool consult and give technical support to these producers, but the choices of what to shoot, how to edit, and the planning of playback and feedback situations are the responsibility of the producer. (One implication of this approach for cable tv is that legal liability for the content of programming must rest with the individual producer and not the cable station or the franchise owner. This will protect us from the super-censorship of broadcast tv and insure responsible programming.) And in this ethic, the people in front of the camera are as important as those behind it. Nobody is exploited for his appeal to the broad audience "out there in TV land" (substitute 'newspaper-land, radio-land, etc). When we shoot, we inform people of our identity and purpose, and we request their permission. We try to always play back the tape right away, so people can see themselves before others see them. If they don't like how they look or what they said, we can erase that part of the tape. When we show the tape to others, we encourage them to respond on tape, building an on-going dialogue... 'process' rather than just 'product' again. We feel that these open approaches to television have important implications for how we want to use cable when we have it... to use it rather than be used by it, to be active producers rather than passive receivers, to be involved in processes of dialogue rather than polarized by traditional news and public affairs approaches."

Sources consulted

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2. Feedback:Feedforward, Media Equipment Pool, Fall 1971.
3. Videoscope Vol 1 No. 2, 1977.
4. Access, 1978
5. John Warden, "Pulling the Plug", Afterimage. Vol. 15, No. 8, March 1988